

Message Text

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ORIGIN EA-12

INFO OCT-01 NEA-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15
ICA-11 OMB-01 IO-13 /090 R

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EA/J - HCOCHRAN
NEA/IAI - JMCBRIDE
-----090209 200145Z /63

O P 200052Z APR 78
FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO AMEMBASSY SEOUL IMMEDIATE
INFO AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 101016

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PEPR, KS, US, KN

SUBJECT: PING-PONG DIPLOMACY

REF: (A) SEOUL 3210, (B) SEOUL 3219

1. ROK EMBASSY COUNSELOR PARK APRIL 19 RAISED WITH DEPARTMENT ISSUE OF YOMIURI ARTICLE SUGGESTING U.S. PING PONG DIPLOMACY WITH NORTH KOREA. EA/K DIRECTOR GAVE PARK FOLLOWING FACTS, WHICH YOU MAY ALSO CONVEY TO ROKG AS APPROPRIATE.
 2. U.S. TABLE TENNIS ASSOCIATION IN AUGUST 1977 QUERIED DEPARTMENT INFORMALLY REGARDING ARRANGEMENTS FOR TRAVEL TO NORTH KOREA AND PROSPECTS FOR SOME USG FUNDING TO PARTICIPATE IN 1979 WORLD TOURNAMENT SPORTS EXCHANGE PROGRAM.
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DEPARTMENT INFORMED ASSOCIATION THAT U.S. RESTRICTIONS ON TRAVEL OF AMERICAN CITIZENS TO NORTH KOREA EXPIRED IN MARCH, 1977, ALTHOUGH THERE ARE PROBLEMS INHERENT IN SUCH TRAVEL. WE ALSO INFORMED THE ASSOCIATION THAT USG FINANCIAL SUPPORT WAS NOT AVAILABLE. ONLY SUBSEQUENT DIALOGUE WE HAVE HAD WAS INQUIRY ABOUT THE POSSIBLE DANGERS IN TAKING TO PYONGYANG TWO MEMBERS OF THE U.S. TEAM WHO

ARE PERMANENT RESIDENTS RETAINING ROK CITIZENSHIP. THE ASSOCIATION WAS INFORMED OF THE POTENTIAL DIFFICULTIES

AND THE INABILITY OF THE USG TO PROVIDE ANY ASSURANCES OF SAFETY.

3. THERE IS NO USG SPONSORSHIP OF THIS TRIP, AND THE IMPLICATION OF "PERMISSION" IS INCORRECT SINCE THE ISSUE OF USG PERMISSION DOES NOT ARISE. THERE IS NO BASIS FOR YOMIURI'S SPECULATION.

4. FYI: IN ITS EARLIER COMMUNICATION WITH THE DEPARTMENT, THE U.S. TABLE TENNIS ASSOCIATION REPORTED THAT THEY HAD BEEN INFORMED THAT NORTH KOREA WAS INVITING ALL MEMBER COUNTRIES OF THE INTERNATIONAL TABLE TENNIS FEDERATION TO THE 1979 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS. WE NOW LEARN THAT PYONGYANG HAS NOT INVITED EITHER THE ROK OR ISRAEL, BOTH OF WHOM ARE MEMBERS. WE PLAN TO CALL THIS TO THE ATTENTION OF THE U.S. ASSOCIATION FOR APPROPRIATE CONSIDERATION, ALTHOUGH WE DO NOT INTEND TO MAKE RECOMMENDATION AS TO THEIR OWN ATTENDANCE. END FYI

5. IN CONNECTION WITH THIS TOPIC, EA/K DIRECTOR RICH INFORMED PARK UNDER INSTRUCTIONS THAT THE SUGGESTION OF PAK SANG-YONG TO POLCOUNS CLARK THAT JAPANESE PRESS WAS BEING UTILIZED BY USG AS TRIAL BALLOON FOR KOREA INIATIVES
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WAS "RIDICULOUS," AND WHILE WE APPRECIATED ROK CONCERNS, WE ALSO HOPED THAT ROK WOULD GIVE MORE WEIGHT TO OUR STATEMENTS THAN TO THE JAPANESE PRESS. THE CONSTANT DOUBTS CAST ON OUR RELATIONSHIP BY REPEATED ROKG COMPLAINTS AND EXPRESSIONS OF CONCERN WERE AN UNWORTHY IRRITANT AT A TIME WHEN OUR BASIC COOPERATION WAS ON A DEMONSTRABLY IMPROVED BASIS.

6. WE DO NOT KNOW ANY SPECIFIC EVENT WHICH PRECIPITATED YOMIURI STORY AT THIS TIME. WHEN DEPTOFF WAS QUERIED BY YOMIURI CORRESPONDENT HERE, HE SIMPLY POINTED OUT REMOVAL OF TRAVEL RESTRAINTS ON USE OF U.S. PASSPORTS AND PRIVATE NATURE OF TABLE TENNIS ASSOCIATION PLANS. CHRISTOPHER

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: FOREIGN RELATIONS, ATHLETIC PRESENTATIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 20 apr 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978STATE101016
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: RGRICH:FLW
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780168-0534
Format: TEL
From: STATE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780434/aaaabctd.tel
Line Count: 107
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 905a79aa-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ORIGIN EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 SEOUL 3210, 78 SEOUL 3219
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 06 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2901410
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PING-PONG DIPLOMACY
TAGS: PEPR, SCUL, KS, US, KN
To: SEOUL
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/905a79aa-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014